



Smoke detector tips

Noting that more than 300,000 people are injured and over 6,000 die each year in home fires, the **Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)** has endorsed home use of smoke detectors and has a booklet for consumers discussing selection, installation, and maintenance of smoke detectors.

By sensing rising smoke from a fire and sounding an alarm, a home smoke detector can increase the chance of an early warning of fire and enable occupants to escape safely.

Many states and municipalities have laws that require smoke detectors in homes and apartments. Two basic kinds of smoke detectors are currently on the market: the photoelectric smoke detector, which uses a beam of light, and the ionization chamber smoke detector, which involves electrically-charged air molecules called ions. Photoelectric detectors are somewhat more likely to respond earlier to a smoldering fire while ionization detectors are usually quicker to warn of open, flaming fires.

There are arguments for and against each type of smoke detector, but CPSC judges that, based on current information, either type can provide adequate protection from home fires.

CPSC suggests that consumers buy a smoke detector containing a full description of its operation, instructions for proper installation, and information on the expected life of its components. Install at least one on each level of the house, on side wall or ceiling, as recommended by the manufacturer.

As few as one or 2 smoke detectors may be adequate for basic protection, but one should be near each sleeping area. CPSC also advises placing a smoke detector at the top of basement stairways.

The Commission urges owners of battery operated smoke detectors to replace batteries at least once a year, even if the warning device for weak batteries included on some models has not sounded. Also, photoelectric bulbs should be replaced when they burn out, and all detectors should be tested monthly.

For a free copy of the booklet on smoke detectors write Smoke Detector Booklet, Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 20207; or call the CPSC toll-free hotline at 800-638-2666. In Maryland call toll-free 800-492-2937.

Vol. 8, No. 23, Dec. 1, 1978

Report card on Federal complaint handling

A follow-up assessment by an independent contractor of how well 22 Federal agencies handle consumer complaints has found "substantial improvement" since an original survey of the same agencies in 1975-1976.

At an upcoming press conference to release the results of this latest phase of an ongoing long-term study, Esther Peterson, the President's consumer advisor, will caution that despite report cards showing general and, in some cases, dramatic improvement, over a third of the agencies were found to lag significantly in some or many aspects of effective and efficient consumer complaint handling.

The recheck of agency complaint handling systems was part of a 4-year, \$430,000 study by **Technical Assistance Research Programs, Inc., (TARP)** under a contract awarded in 1975 by the **US Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA)** following an open competitive bid process. Of the 22 agencies examined in the Federal phase of the study, 15 are regulatory agencies (e.g., **Food and Drug Administration, Federal Trade Commission**) and 7 others provide goods, service or benefits directly to consumers (e.g., **National Park Service, US Postal Service**).

Other phases of the study focus on consumer complaint handling by state and local governments, private and voluntary organizations, and industry. TARP's evaluation of complaint handling in these other sectors will be submitted in early 1979 as part of its final report to OCA. Also due in early 1979 is a TARP/OCA analysis of the state of the art of consumer complaint handling, based on the data gathered for the study.

Peterson will emphasize the independent nature of the TARP study, noting that TARP cited OCA for limited progress in setting standards for and coordinating Federal complaint handling, areas she is stressing in her reorganization of OCA. (See **CONSUMER NEWS** Nov. 15.)

Since the President appointed her Director of OCA in August, Peterson has asked the heads of the agencies surveyed on complaint handling for their response to the TARP study and specific plans to improve their deficiencies. When asked by **CONSUMER NEWS** whether the TARP recommendations will require more people to handle consumer complaints to Federal agencies, Peterson replied that "TARP shows that agencies can handle complaints better with more efficient systems—they don't need more people."

Last call for "Conference call"

It is still not too late to make reservations for the Consumer Telephone Workshop, to be held at the Shoreham Americana Hotel in Washington, DC on Dec. 11 and 12. As noted in **CONSUMER NEWS** Oct. 1 and Oct. 15, the conference itself is free, but the Workshop's 2 luncheons cost \$22. Checks for the luncheons should be made out in advance to Shoreham Americana Hotel and mailed to **US Office of Consumer Affairs, 621 Reporters Bldg., Washington, DC 20201**. Call Sylvia Solhaug (202-755-8877) for more information.

OCA comments

The US Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) regularly prepares comments on pending Federal actions. Here is a summary of a recent OCA comment that should be of particular interest to consumers.

BUSES AND PACKAGE DELIVERY

OCA has told the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) that it supports a petition by Trailways, Inc. to relax regulation of small package shipments by bus.

Relaxing these rules may allow the financially troubled bus industry to better compete in the small package delivery business, possibly leading to better and less expensive package shipments for consumers in many areas.

The increased business to bus companies may also permit them to maintain and expand passenger bus service. Many low-income consumers and small towns depend on intercity bus service, and OCA urged the ICC to "take whatever steps it can to provide any and all economic tools that will help to preserve this last remaining viable transportation service for rural and low-income Americans."

Specifically, the Trailways proposal would: increase the size of packages allowed for delivery by bus from a maximum of 100 pounds to a maximum of 500 pounds; allow bus companies greater flexibility to apportion space between passengers and freight; permit easier entry by bus companies into the package delivery market; and authorize greater price flexibility. Under the proposal, however, the ICC would still have the authority to control pricing where it is discriminatory, where it may be harmful to competition, or where monopolies exist.

OCA said it supports the Trailways petition based "upon a firm conviction that relaxing restrictions on the transportation of small shipments would be in the interest of both the bus industry and the consumers who rely on it for their transportation needs."

OCA also said that because of the expansive network of intercity bus terminals, the bus industry "is obviously well suited to compete in this market on the basis of service and price."

For a copy of OCA's statement to ICC supporting the Trailways petition, write to US Office of Consumer Affairs, 621 Reporters Bldg., Washington, DC 20201; or call 202-755-8810.

Page 2

The season for giving—with care

We all know that charities in the US are big business whose success or failure depends on the motivation and generosity of individual citizens.

Particularly during the Christmas season consumers are solicited by mail, phone, personal visits, in stores, on street corners—and they are generous donors. In fact, according to the American Association of Fund Raising Counsel, Inc., Americans gave \$35 billion to support charities last year—about \$96.4 million a day, with individuals giving 83.8% of the total. Foundations, corporations, and bequests accounted for the remaining 16.2%. In addition, 40 million people worked a total of 6 billion hours of volunteer time for charities.

Since charities are such big business, it may be surprising that there are so few laws covering them. There are some existing and proposed controls: (1) **Internal Revenue Service** has authority to approve or rescind the tax exempt status of applicants based on their intended purpose; (2) many states have some type of charity regulation; and (3) a bill was introduced in Congress last year (HR 41) by Rep. Charles H. Wilson of California to require charitable organizations that ask for mail contributions to disclose pertinent information—legal name and address of the organization; purpose of appeal and intended use of contribution; percentage of previous year's contributions which remained for the charitable purpose after expenses; and availability of a financial statement from the organization upon request. (Although hearings were held, the bill did not get to the House floor, and no announcement that it will be reintroduced later has been made.) However, even if a version of HR 41 does not eventually become law, the **US Postal Service** is permitted to issue mail stop orders against anyone who tries to get money through the mail by false representation.

In the meantime, the **Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc. (BBB)** would like to hear about solicitations that "don't sound right." You may write or call the BBB serving your community. And here are some BBB tips for giving—to help donors evaluate the many appeals for contributions they receive.

- Make sure an organization tells you what its programs are and what it does with its money.
- If you receive a direct mail appeal, the appeal should be easy to understand and not disguised as a bill or an urgent invoice. Find out if contributions are tax deductible. Always send a check to the organization (not an individual)—never send cash.
- If the charity sends you unordered items in its appeal, such as nature stamps, ballpoint pens and key rings, you are under no obligation to return them or to pay for them. If the appeal requests money for such items, call your local BBB.
- Be sure there is an address to which you can write for more information about the organization.
- For door-to-door appeals, if you don't know the person or the charity he or she represents, ask for identification and ask questions about the product the person is selling. How much of the price is going toward the charity? Again, write your check to the charity, not to an individual.

Finally, BBB's **Philanthropic Advisory Service** has compiled a list of 400 non-profit organizations, indicating whether or not they comply with BBB's voluntary standards for charitable solicitations. *Give But Give Wisely* is available for \$1.00 and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The address is Philanthropic Advisory Service, Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., 1150 17th St., NW, Washington, DC 20036.

CONSUMER NEWS

Carpools and money

The cost of owning and operating cars in the US increased by \$51 billion, or 15.6%, in 1977, according to an annual study recently released by the car rental firm, **Hertz Corp.** More than \$376 billion was spent to own and operate cars and trucks last year.

Passenger car expenditures have risen 80% since 1972, the report says, and per-gallon fuel costs have increased 141% since 1950. Per-mile ownership and operating cost increases, however, have risen 207% during those years.

The chart below, developed by the **Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)**, shows consumers how much money they can save by ridesharing in daily commuting. By making commuters aware of the costs of driving alone as compared to the costs of ridesharing, FHWA hopes that more commuters who presently drive alone will carpool or vanpool. Not only will the commuter save money, but the nation will save fuel, air pollution will be reduced, and the highway system will serve more people in fewer vehicles.

The operating costs shown in the table include all mileage-related costs associated with the work trip for gas, oil, maintenance, tires, and repairs. The

owning costs shown in the table include all other non-mileage related costs associated with owning a vehicle, such as insurance, depreciation, finance charges, licenses, and taxes. The chart also reflects 2 types of carpooling costs—shared driving, where each of the carpoolers takes a turn driving, and shared riding, where one auto is used and all share the costs. The table is based on the assumption that the average person works 250 days per year, and the costs of parking the vehicle at work are not included because those costs vary widely.

In addition, costs are shown for ridesharing using an 8-person or 12-person van. The concept of vanpooling has become increasingly popular since up to 90% of vanpool program start-up expenses have become available to states from the **Transportation Dept.** (See CONSUMER NEWS March 1.)

The chart shows that considerable savings—up to over \$1,900 annually—are possible by switching to ridesharing instead of driving alone. A pamphlet called *Rideshare and Save—A Cost Comparison*, is available free by sending a postcard to Consumer Information Center, Dept. 512G, Pueblo, CO 81009. It includes a worksheet designed to allow the driver an opportunity to calculate the commuting costs for his or her particular situation, and to compare the costs of driving alone to the costs of various carpooling and vanpooling situations.

ANNUAL COSTS OF COMMUTING TO WORK
Driving Alone and Ridesharing

One-Way Commute (miles)	Vehicle Type	Cost Category	Drive Alone	Ridesharing Options					
				Shared-Driving Carpool		Shared-Riding Carpool		Vanpool	
				2-person	4-person	2-person	4-person	8-person	12-person
10	Subcompact (Pinto, Vega, etc)	Operating	264	132	66	132	66	57	38
		Owning	236	144	86	118	59		
		Total	500	276	152	250	125	270	180
10	Standard (LTD, Caprice, etc)	Operating	418	209	105	209	105	327	218
		Owning	332	204	121	166	83		
		Total	750	413	226	375	188		
20	Subcompact	Operating	528	264	132	264	132	114	76
		Owning	330	230	144	165	83		
		Total	858	494	276	429	215	270	180
20	Standard	Operating	837	418	209	418	209	384	256
		Owning	464	326	204	232	116		
		Total	1301	744	413	650	325		
40	Subcompact	Operating	1056	528	264	528	264	228	152
		Owning	412	321	224	206	103		
		Total	1468	849	488	734	367	270	180
40	Standard	Operating	1674	837	418	837	418	498	332
		Owning	580	454	326	290	145		
		Total	2254	1291	744	1127	563		

S-p-r-e-a-d-i-n-g the word

Consumer Survival Kit, the only consumer series on nationwide TV, is carried on more than 200 **Public Broadcasting System (PBS)** stations throughout the country. Below is the air schedule for the first 2 months of 1979 (check local listing for time and date of show).

	PBS Feed Date
Cruises/private schools/ medigap	Jan. 6
Prescription drugs/ advertising/adoption	Jan. 13
Coffee/tenant's rights/car leasing	Jan. 20
Homesteading/tires/ estate planning	Jan. 27
Supermarkets/ orthodontics/condominiums	Feb. 3
Cholesterol/life insurance/ displaced homemakers	Feb. 10
Auto repair/ typewriters/fast foods	Feb. 17
No-fault insurance/ panty hose/homebuying	Feb. 24

Getting Yours: A Consumer's Guide To Obtaining Your Medical Record is a **Public Citizen's Health Research Group** publication that explains the importance of patient access to medical records and how to go about getting those records. It is available for \$2 and a large, self-addressed envelope from Health Research Group, Dept. MR, 2000 P St., NW, Suite 708, Washington, DC 20036. Discounts are available on bulk orders.

For the record . . .

If you, like so many others, hope to become a famous Nashville musician, make sure nobody exploits you. More and more people are taking high hopes to Nashville in a bid for stardom, but very few get rich and famous.

Many do get ripped off. Music industry questions topped the list of inquiries to the Nashville/Middle Tennessee **Better Business Bureau (BBB)** last year.

Victims of rip-offs are would-be and never-to-be singers and composers who are promised a variety of services (some of which are never performed), such as setting poems to music, cutting records and distributing them across the country, and promoting performers as "stars."

Aspiring musicians usually pay from \$3,000 to \$5,000—sometimes considerably more—for these services. In many instances the sales techniques are similar to those of the "vanity press" for would-be writers, and the results are similar—no one gets rich except the publishers and record companies.

These unscrupulous operators almost always snare their ambitious victims by heaping praise on them for their "talent," whether real, limited or nonexistent, and by hinting at riches around the corner.

The **Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)** has been checking on these operators, and as a result 3 people in one company were indicted recently on 13 counts of mail and wire fraud. More indictments are expected.

If, however, you're considering giving stardom a try, or know someone who is, the Music Industry Information Panel, a volunteer group of music representatives trying to deal with consumer problems in their industry, suggests you carefully check out reputable producers. Call the BBB, the **American Federation of Musicians**, or the **American Federation of Television and Radio Artists** for assistance.

After that, make sure you understand any contracts you sign—know who's getting your money and what you get in return.

For more useful information on the recording industry, write for the Music Industry Information Panel's free booklet *What You Should Know About Making a Record in Nashville*, available from the Tennessee Dept. of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 40627, Melrose Station, Nashville, TN 37204.

CONSUMER NEWS is published the 1st and 15th of each month by the US Office of Consumer Affairs to report Federal Government programs for consumers. Use of funds for printing this publication through Sept. 30, 1979, approved by Office of Management and Budget. Authorization to reproduce any or all items is granted. Editorial address is CONSUMER NEWS, US Office of Consumer Affairs, 621 Reporters Bldg., Washington, DC 20201; Howard Seltzer, Acting Director of Public Affairs (202) 755-8810; Marion Q. Ciaccio, Managing Editor (202) 755-8830. Sold by Consumer Information Center, Pueblo, CO 81009; subscription \$6 a year, payable to "Supt. of Documents." Send address change to Supt. of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

US GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1979 260-929/6
DHEW PUBLICATION NO. (OS) 79-108

UNITED STATES
OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF H.E.W.
391

First Class



1979 JAN 15
CNEW SER 1003-155DUE021R 1
SERIALS PROCESSING
XEROX/UNIV MICROFILMS
300 N ZEEB RD
ANN ARBOR MI 48106

Consumer News: Dec. 1, 1978